

Workshop: SIWG Taking Stock and the Next Steps

Name of the Group

In order to avoid any confusion with the Inclusive York Forum it was suggested that the Social Inclusion Working Group (SIWG) be renamed the Fair Practice Working Group. Members were asked if they supported this proposal or if they had other suggestions.

These are the comments and alternative names that the Group suggested:

- Fair Practice Working Group is not descriptive enough of what we do
- Equality Voice - Equality Advisory Group
- Equal Access Working Group
- Equality Working Group (suggested 3 times)
- Equalities Advisory Group
- SIWG (keep the same name!) (suggested 3 times)
- All Inclusive Working Group
- Equality and Respect Working Group - "EARWIG"

How do we make sure that we are meeting our objectives?

The Group were reminded of the objectives of SIWG. The role of the Group is to advise the Executive on all matters relating to equalities issues. It seeks to promote awareness of equalities issues and to ensure improved access and facilities for all service users. In that context the Group:

1. Advises the Executive on equalities issues in respect of major projects and initiatives and on equalities issues generally in the City of York Council.

2. Extends and builds contact with groups and individuals in the area in order to facilitate input into equalities and provide opportunities for all citizens in the area.
3. Provides a link with Ward Committees so that equalities issues which are raised can be taken further.

The Group were asked to consider a proposal whereby the Group would advise the Executive primarily through consideration of EIAs and through issues that arise at community surgeries. It was proposed that councillors who served on SIWG would go out to meet with equality organisations. Views were sought as to how many EIAs the Group would wish to consider and whether they would wish to focus on service/process EIAs or ones related to policy.

The Group made the following comments:

- Need to advise the Executive but not just through EIAs
- How will the community surgeries work? What about the capacity of Councillors?
- Delete the reference to ward committees - SIWG is probably not best placed for this
- 6 strands should work on a web-based training session for staff to work through prior to them preparing EIAs. The EIAs should then come to SIWG or a forum using the 6 strand scenarios delivered by group members
- Proper consideration should be given to EIAs - not tokenism
- SIWG should have an input when policies were being drafted and then consider the EIA when the policy was finalised...but does SIWG have the capacity to do this in view of the number of EIAs? - there are 88 to do.

- Could some of the EIAs be circulated to the Group by email for their comments rather than having to wait for a SIWG meeting?
- Support for the suggestion that some EIAs be circulated to relevant outside organisations for their input.
- If SIWG is to truly work there needs to be a more concrete way for us to make an impact. New members should be given a briefing on what the forum does so they don't feel thrown in at the deep end
- Yes - strategy/policy EIAs not all go to SIWG
- Who will organise and promote the community surgeries? By strand/geography?
- Give strands the chance to influence the councillors' training
- Yes - we should advise the Executive through EIAs
- Make sure the officer in charge of submitting EIAs to specialist groups is fully aware of all the groups. Discuss how the decision is made as to who to send the EIA to
- The timing of meetings which aim to speak to the public excludes people who can't attend during the working day - including many of the SIWG members - eg the "Get it Right" days
- Would it be possible for SIWG to put together some web-based training for council staff?

It was agreed that it would be useful for the Group to receive copies of the developing systems and standards for EIAs that had been prepared for council officers.

Meetings

In response to concerns that had been raised regarding the length of meetings the following proposals were put to the Group:

1. There should be 3 SIWG business meetings a year (2 hours in duration). These would focus on a programme of EIAs and would track progress and outcomes.
2. There would be 3 EIA day-long fairs - "Help us Get it Right Days". Half of the places would be allocated to groups represented on SIWG and half would be allocated to groups accessed through CVS.
3. There would be 2 SIWG Development Days.
4. Every 2 years there would be a SIWG Conference focussed on the "Place Survey"

This is what the Group said:

- Meeting times need to be varied. People who work and pupils can't go to day-long "Get it Right" days. I can't afford to take part in them. Meetings should be shorter and not over-run. SIWG meetings should be held every 2 or 3 months.
- CYC to send out to every household a survey to obtain the information and collate findings.
- Too many day meetings - small organisations do not have the capacity to attend - no resources.
- Day meetings are not convenient due to work commitments
- Day time events have their place but no more than 2 a year
- Keep the same number of evening meetings - we're building relationships. Need more effective use of time - SMART meetings!
- Business meetings - more structured. EIA days are good but need plenty of notice. Not certain about workshops.
- It's difficult to get 6 reps to one event - even when there are 20,000 students on hand! Full day events are difficult too. Would prefer shorter and more frequent meetings/consultations
- It's for groups to decide the agenda (including which EIAs to consider) - should not all be decided by the Council
- Youth Council Members - ask them about six friends

- Rather than allocating three working days for EIAs (this precludes working people) say change to 12 evening sessions with known topics so that delegates only attend those of self-interest.
- Day meetings "exclude" working people and sometimes young people
- Ask university and school councils to put items on their agendas to get broader input. Also other strands - make sure we're going to diverse members of the strands - send surveys to go where the people are
- If you want young people to attend you need to have days which are in one of the half-term holidays
- Many interested people work office hours. Can some "days" be on a Saturday - officers can have toils as can voluntary groups officers
- Give the proposed arrangements a try - see how it works out
- Useful - Mansion House meeting with council chiefs on More for York. Tell us we respond
- Council needs to look at **all** groups and membership ie Healthy City, Without Walls, Inclusive York Forum, Learning Disability Forum, CIL, Racial Equality Network. We are all feeding into the same things. All are wanting day workshops.
- To keep our meetings focussed - firm chairing and councillors well briefed before coming to listen to us.

Membership

The Group considered suggestions put forward at the SIWG Development Day about the membership of the Group.

Community Groups

It was proposed that community group representatives should be from umbrella organisations.

Their role should be to scrutinise EIAs.

They should have a job description.

They should be elected by community groups and have a two-year term of office.

They should be entitled to attendance allowance or have the costs reimbursed.

Newsletters/frequent items on their meetings agendas should be used to cascade information to their organisations and to seek their views about issues being considered by SIWG.

Community representatives should receive proper induction and training.

Expert Witnesses

Should be recruited from specific groups that lobby for particular topics (e.g. epilepsy society)

They should be happy to talk about their personal experiences

They should serve no longer than two years

Training would not be required

They would receive expenses

They would not have to cascade information or seek views

They would not be able to make decisions at meetings

Councillors

It was proposed to retain 5 councillors on the Group

How would community groups wish Councillors to contribute to their work?

The Group made the following comments about the proposals:

- Councillors play a vital role and are there to represent whilst adding expertise
- There are the right number of councillors on SIWG
- Expert witnesses need to be streamlined
- It's difficult to get interest for representatives to attend meetings generally

ANNEX B

- Rubbish suggestion that there is a two-year term of office - would lose training and expertise. Five years would be useful. Publicise members' names and invite the public to contact them if necessary. Valuing People Partnership Board 2 places co leads ie Fiona Walker and Maureen Ryan. Membership should be whilst on VPP Board
- Need Youth Council representatives and Centre for Independent Living representatives. How do we do this?
- Do we still need the strict gender rules? Do we follow them?
- Representatives should be elected (but why just two years?). Re-election possible?
- Rep on umbrella groups - what happens if cannot get another elected rep?
- Some SIWG budget should be given to strands to publicise to their members how to feedback to the council through their SIWG reps
- Community representatives need to take initiative to feedback and start discussions
- The Humanist expert witness has no formal process for receiving feedback from York Humanists forum
- Need to leave membership "open" for new groups/reps if possible
- I didn't receive induction - it's a very good idea. Strands should be able to feedback their issues (w/management to ensure it doesn't take forever)
- Expert witnesses - should be invited for single meetings - not serve for x number of years
- OK to have a two-year term of office but then eligible for re-election
- Young people from Youth Council and Children's Society.
- Induction a good idea. Need to look at whole membership picture.
- Witnesses should only come when specifically needed for a specific EIA or discussion topic.

- Councillors should be the interpreters of council to us at SIWG. Induction very important for new SIWG members.
- Expert witnesses should only come when their specific expertise is needed.
- Councillors - invaluable because I believe they are listening and taking issues back.
- Are the strands represented by the right people? Needs to be reviewed eg Higher York is unknown to most students, even student unions.

Budgets

The Group were reminded that the SIWG budget was £5000 per year. The principles that had previously been agreed about allocating the funding included:

- it should be used for work that supported the three objectives of SIWG
- it should not be used for running costs
- it should be used for new projects - particularly for hard to reach groups
- it should be used for one-off projects

The Group were asked for their comments on how the budget should be allocated in future and their views as to whether it should be used for inter-strand projects that involved a number of groups.

The Group made the following comments:

- Need to set budget with work plan in mind. Discuss all in advance
- Cross-strand promotion - working with other strands. Publicity budget for each strand to encourage more participation so the SIWG reps are better informed to be reps.

- City wide (city centre) events
- Ask groups how budget should be spent. Invite groups to ask for funding and present a case
- Agree work plan and then allocate budget
- Budget should pay for expenses for inter-group working. No discrete project should be awarded as difficult to monitor and confuse objectives.
- Budgets should be assessed on the needs of the group's work programme in the next twelve months.
- Part of the budget should be used to fund travel/babysitting to allow members to attend.
- Could any of the money be used to help re-establish an overarching group for disabled people?
- Budget should be used to promote equality
- To carry SIWG 6-strand awareness into existing events via displays, events in festivals, city-wide or national TV forum/debate
- Some core running costs need to be addressed. Community group representatives must, where needed, have travel costs to SIWG met to enable them to come to meetings.
- Newsletters for 6 stands
- What happened to the card scheme that received funding from SIWG?